

PRESS RELEASE

Congressman John Conyers, Jr.

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Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary
Dean, Congressional Black Caucus

FOR RELEASE:
September 10, 2001

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Conyers Chastises Rice on Slavery and Reparations

Representative John Conyers, Jr., (D-MI) ranking member on the House Judiciary Committee, chastised National Security Condoleezza Rice on her lack of historical perspective in commenting on the slavery and reparations debate at the recently concluded UN World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa. A member of the U.S. delegation to the conference, Conyers declared, "Reparations is not about a check to individuals. The call for reparations represents a commitment to entering a constructive dialogue on the role of slavery and racism in shaping American society." On the Sunday-televised program "Meet the Press" Rice Commented that African-Americans should not be compensated for the past wrongs of slavery.

Conyers stated that, "The 20th century struggle for civil and human rights has created a climate for equality to replace might as the defining principle in international relations. Nations like Switzerland and South Africa have shown that confronting the sins of the past is imperative to developing a real commitment to equality. I believe that a dialogue on reparations is a necessary part of that commitment."

Conyers observed that, "Ms. Rice has failed to understand the significance of her own history. American apartheid was not dying under its own weight; it was ended by the collective will of Americans familiar and nameless during the civil rights era through the passage of federal legislation. However, the nation has focused on the social effects of slavery and segregation and missed the continuing economic implications of these institutions. These economic issues are the root cause of many critical issues in the African-American community, such as education, healthcare and crime. In order to appropriately address these issues, we must re-examine the history surrounding economic institutions in the African-American community."

Conyers has introduced legislation (H.R. 40) that would establish a commission to examine the institution of slavery, study the impact of subsequent and continuing discrimination against African-Americans resulting directly and indirectly from slavery, during the apartheid of reconstruction, desegregation and the present day. The commission would make recommendations concerning any form of apology and compensation.

Conyers stated that, "I went to Durban to encourage a balanced international debate on the issues of slavery and reparations. Statements dismissing reparations on the grounds of payment questions are completely premature, especially when we have not yet had a national dialogue or study of the issue. Given the trust funds that have been established for Holocaust survivors, internment victims and Native Americans, there is ample precedent for reparations. Clearly the issue merits discussion at both an American and international level to develop a consensus on the most appropriate way to confront the vestiges of past and continuing discrimination."